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# johnson sauk trail

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STATE PARK



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## THE PARK

Johnson Sauk Trail State Park lies in the beautiful rolling hills of north central Illinois in Henry County, off Route 78, six miles north of Kewanee and six miles south of Interstate 80. The 867-acre park is named in part as a tribute to Frank P. Johnson, of Kewanee, who was active in the development of this area into a state park until his death in 1955. Sauk Trail is presumably named in honor of Chief Black Hawk, a Sauk Indian, whose tribe lived in the area.

## THE LAKE

Set amidst acres of oaks and rimmed by acres of pines, the lake offers the peace and serenity of the countryside. The 58-acre man-made lake, contained by an earthen dam, has a maximum depth of 26 feet, a shoreline of 2.3 miles and is fed by 500 springs and 3 creeks.

The lake project came into being in 1944 when a series of lakes were being considered for Illinois. After studying several possible sites, 369 acres of land north of Kewanee, known as Whiting's Woods, were eventually purchased. Actual construction of the lake began in April, 1949, but, encountering unfavorable soil conditions, the work was halted when advised it would be impossible to construct a dam. Work was later resumed in the summer of 1955 when the project was reactivated through the untiring efforts of Senator Johnson and advanced methods of dam construction were developed.

## HISTORY

The park is located on the southern edge of what was once ecologically considered by many conservationists as one of the most concentrated wildlife habitats in the central part of the North American Continent. This marshland, commonly known as the "Great Willow Swamp," took in many acres of the lowlands between the Rock and Mississippi rivers and, being prime environment, wildlife responded to it in great abundance.

French: The park lands encompassed in Henry County were later part of the Great Northwest Territory claimed by the French. The King of

France gave this land to the Company of the Indies in 1732 but it was returned to France in 1759 following the company's bankruptcy. In 1776 it was ceded to Great Britain.

When it became part of Virginia in 1778, the territory became known as the County of Illinois and from that year to 1825 Henry County was a part of many counties. In 1825, having met the 350 resident requirement of the legislature, Henry County was officially formed. However, it wasn't until March 2, 1837, that it became self-governed.

Indian: It was the abundance of the wild game and furbearing animals that made this area so attractive to the Indians. The mound builders were one of the first inhabitants of this area, leaving what is evidently a sealed mound, at present unexcavated, within a few miles southeast of the park. Later other tribes, the Sauk, Fox, Winnebago, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Kaskaskia, Peoria and the Piankeshaw established villages near this area.

The Kickapoo Indians made their villages on the Mississippi just south of the present city of Milan from 1827 to 1831, the Potawatomi at Lafayette,

the Winnebago at Prophetstown, the Kaskaskia at Peoria Heights and LaSalle and the Peoria at Peoria from 1710 to 1770. The Piankeshaw Indians had a village just north of Morris from 1692 until 1712 when they were driven to southern Illinois.

The Winnebago Indians coming down from their Wisconsin home claimed the northern part of the marshland and established their village at what is now Prophetstown. They used the Johnson Sauk Trail area as one of their favorite campgrounds and the influence of their language can still be heard today. The name of the nearby town of Kewanee is derived from the Winnebago word meaning "prairie chicken."

The Sauk, when pressed by the French and their Indian allies, left the Green Bay area in Wisconsin to settle in villages at what is now the city of Milan. They joined with the Fox and formed the Mesquawkie Confederation, named from the French word meaning "dirt face" because of the Indian's custom of covering their faces with dirt or ashes when in mourning.

Small tribes of local Indians formed large confederations to protect themselves from the fre-



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quent raids of the Western Plains Indians and later from the encroachment of the white man. This encroachment caused Chief Pontiac to gather a great force behind him, but it was dissolved at the time of his death.

Most of the Indians in the territory at the time of white settlement were friendly. Chief Black Hawk, then a member of Chief Keokuk's band, was tolerable of the white man until he and his people were forced out of Illinois. Believing the dreams of the spiritual leader of the Winnebago's and thinking a large confederation would rise to run the "white eyes" from the area, Chief Black Hawk returned to Illinois. The rumor of a confederation with the Western tribes brought panic to the citizens of the U.S. The resulting skirmishes with the American troops led to the fame of the Black Hawk War.

Shabbona, a Chief of the Winnebago Indians, and his tribe were friendly to the early settlers and would not rise up against them. It is said when Chief Black Hawk crossed the Mississippi back into Illinois, Chief Shabbona rode three horses to death warning the settlers in his area. After this the Winnebago chief was allowed to enter any store, hotel, or place of business to take what he might, eat what he liked or sleep where he cared without cost or thought. A memorial has been constructed by the people of Ottawa over his grave in Morris, Illinois.

## THE NATURAL SCENE

While winding through the wooded trails the quiet hiker can see a variety of wildlife. Rabbits, opossum, raccoon and the shy, white-tailed deer can often be surprised along the trails by the early morning riser. The black-capped chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, vesper sparrow, song sparrow and goldfinches can be heard high among the various trees. Beside the trails bloom an array of wildflowers throughout the spring and summer. Prairie anemone, yarrow, field daisies, vervain and goldenrod add their colors as the seasons progress.

## FACILITIES

**Picnicking:** There are several picnic areas scattered throughout the park, mostly around the lake. Tables and stoves are available.

**Camping:** There are tent and trailer spaces with some electricity available. A camping permit must be secured from the park ranger. Youth group camping is allowed by reservations only if the group consists of more than 25 persons. A sanitary dump station is near the camping area.

**Fishing:** The angler can catch a variety of fish including largemouth bass, bluegill, sunfish, crappie, channel catfish and bullhead.

**Boating:** Rental boats are available and there is a launching ramp for private boats. No gas motors are allowed; electric trolling only.

**Trails:** There are nine trails that wind around the park. Most of them are wooded but some go through meadows.

**Winter Sports:** Ice-skating, ice fishing, tobogganing and winter camping is allowed if the weather conditions permit.

## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Admittance will not be granted groups of 25 or more persons to any state park or conservation area unless permission from the park ranger has been secured to use the facilities. It is also required that groups of minors have adequate supervision and that at least one responsible adult accompany each group not exceeding 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous State Parks and Memorials are within easy access to every part of the state. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette, White Pines Forest and Giant City. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

All state parks are open the year round, except when weather conditions necessitate the closing of park roads during freezing and thawing periods when access to park facilities is by foot traffic only.

For further information concerning Illinois State Parks and Memorials write to the Division of Education, Department of Conservation, State Office Building, Springfield 62706.



## Park Maps

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